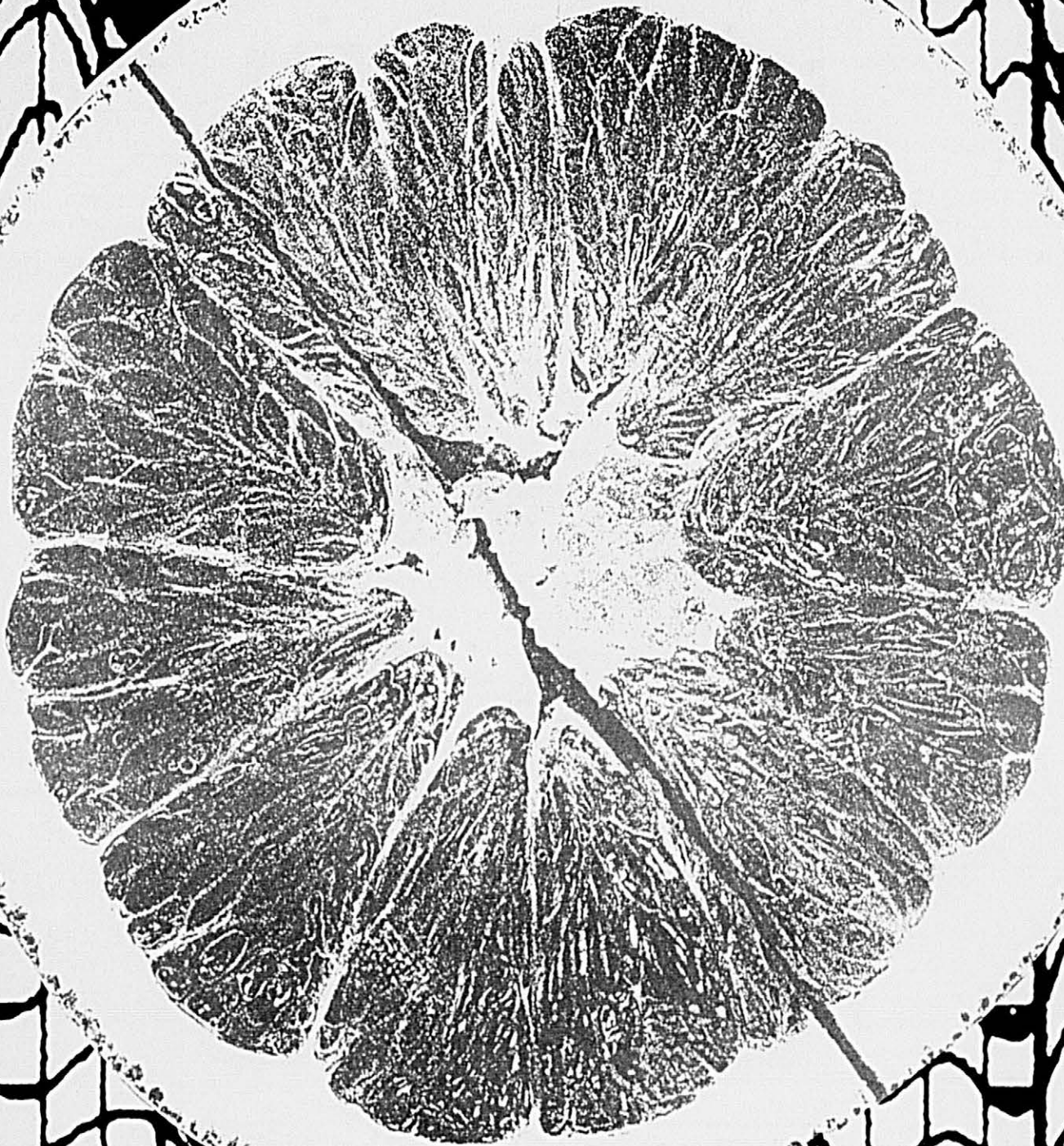


# McGill Daily **Culture**

Page 86 • number 49

February 6 – 12, 1997

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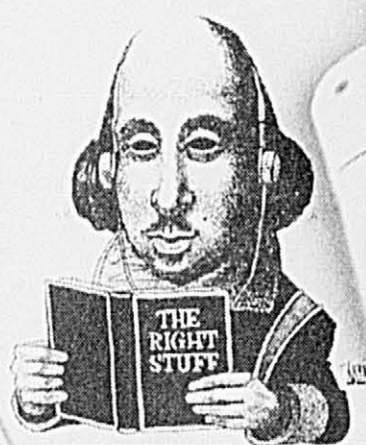
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# The infancy of abstract art

## A Montréal retrospective of Mousseau

by Mimi Gross

There are very few contemporary artists who are so intrinsically associated with the city of Montreal as was Jean-Paul Mousseau. Every day, thousands of people literally walk all over his art on the floors of the Peel Metro station.

Until his death in 1991, Mousseau fought hard to gain acclaim for abstract modern art, and he worked toward abolishing the notion that everyday life and fine art existed on two separate planes, never to meet. A recently opened retrospective exhibit of his work runs at the Montréal Museum of Contemporary Art until April 27, and features close to 200 Mousseau works spanning more than four decades.

One of the first pieces on display at the exhibit is a huge, garishly bright circle of paint entitled "Space-Time Half-Red Modulations." I was amazed once again at what passes for art these days, as this piece reinforced the idea that anyone who throws a can of paint at a wall can call himself an artist. I was even more surprised to discover that this particular piece of "artwork" was owned by none other than McGill University. Wondering how my own financially-stressed school could justify such a purchase, I realized that I had unwittingly become a part of Mousseau's ultimate artistic goals: He sought to make art an integral part of society, and make people think about what they were looking at. I think that even a personal debate about why universities spend money on art at all would have satisfied Mousseau's desire that people think about what role art plays in their lives.

Mousseau's different styles are as distinct as the periods in which they dominated his efforts, and samples of all these endeavours are on display. Many of the earlier pieces in the show, dating as far back as the 1940s, show much more of the artist's direc-

tion toward abstract representation than any classical artistic talent. I suspect that his imaginative sci-fi doodles on the backs of note paper would be considered unremarkable today had Mousseau not gone on to make a name for himself in later years, through other mediums.

His abstract works from the 1950s and 1960s demonstrate a keen sense of light and color that even a staunch Realist movement aficionado could appreciate. Later, he designed the interiors of some Montreal nightclubs and many murals on buildings like the corporate offices of the Royal Bank of

ing his goals. However, in attempting to present a true retrospective, the museum staff has given equal (if not greater) space to the early years when his career was still in its infancy, and his output was accordingly juvenile; I was thoroughly unimpressed by his upside-down trees and stick figures.

Considering the exhibit as a whole, freelance journalist Dorota Kozinska noted that "one is left with the impression that Mousseau had not yet reached a point of artistic maturity marked by a distinct personal style." Unfortunately, this exhibit is too focused on a time when whatever



'UNTITLED', BY MOUSSEAU, 1945

Canada. Theatre sets he constructed for plays like Tennessee Williams' "Summer and Smoke" were elegantly and perfectly understated. It is plain to see how in those later years both Mousseau's art and his goal of bringing art to everyday people became so integrated with popular culture in Montreal.

That said, this exhibit might benefit greatly from placing greater emphasis on the later years of Mousseau's career, when he was closer to achiev-

style he did have was not yet worthy of the well-deserved praise he later received. What seem like miles of generally untitled paintings and drawings that are unforgivably similar truly detract from what could have been a great tribute to a local giant.

Mousseau runs through until April 27 at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (165 St. Catherine W.) Info: 847-6212.

## letters

### Inaccuracies abound in article

To the Daily,

After reading Keri Kosuri's article "Scientific Project of Ethnic Cleansing" (Jan. 20), I hung my head in sorrow. Truly, ignorance regarding DNA and genetic research has reached epic proportions.

There are many blatant inaccuracies contained in this article (it would be easier to list what is correct), but two are especially salient. The first is the disturbing link drawn between taking DNA samples from indigenous communities and their historical mistreatment by colonial powers. As a supporter of native groups, I find it distressing that someone can compare the atrocities committed against indigenous peoples to the taking of consenting blood samples. I am further shocked by the assertion that this act is "just another form of genocide," a word used so often today that I fear future generations will, like Kosuri, forget its meaning.

Kosuri also alleges that "the US military is purposely targeting indigenous peoples to create biological warfare," which is why they are collecting samples of native DNA. This claim is so far-fetched and paranoid that it should be the subject of an X-Files episode, not a feature article. I don't suppose the author paused to consider *why* the government might be doing this? Perhaps as part of a plot to help the aliens who kidnapped Jimmy Hoffa colonize our planet? Maybe it has something to do with the Kennedy assassination?

There is a conspiracy here, but no government agency—terrestrial or otherwise—is behind it. Only a few pseudo-scientists armed with ignorance. Scientific research has been the target of relentless attacks recently, and always by people who know nothing about the subject. The Human Genome Project represents the most significant undertaking in science this century, and it's sad that people like Kosuri are unable to appreciate it.

James Downer, U2 Biology

# events

## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6

- LBGTW Womyn's Group meeting in Women's Union (Shatner 423), 18h30.

- Network for Youth in Community Economics (NYCE) presents "Approaches to Community Economic Development," with Debbie Harrison of the NDG Loan Circle Program, in Wilson Hall, Wendy Patrick room. Info: 298-7411.

- McGill Taiwanese Students' Association celebrates the Chinese New Year with free food and live music. 10h-15h, Shatner Rm 107-108.

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7

- LBGTW Coming Out Group and Men's Discussion Group meetings in UTC basement (3521 University), 17h30 and 19h respectively.

- The Yellow Door presents The Eyes of The Smiling Cow Singers and Catherine Herrmann, Admission \$3, 20h, 3625 Aylmer.

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10

- McGill's Classical Music Club meets 18h30, Strathcona Music Building, C205.

- Social Justice Committee of Montréal offers a free interactive presentation on the Third World Debt Crisis, 18h30, second floor, 1857 de Maisonneuve West. Info: 933-6797.

- McGill Debating Union presents "BIRT the Canadian Labour Movement is dead" featuring D'Arcy Martin, Ed.D. Shatner 302, 18h.

# Submit!

**Comics** — no serials please,

keep 'em self-contained

*Off the darkroom floor* — creative, non-article related photographs

**Letters** — Responses to articles, responses to responses, encouragement, support, vituperation (max. 300 words)

**Hyde Park** — Get it off your chest (max. 500 words)



## errata

In the comment in the Monday, February 3 issue, *All romance and little truth*, the quote criticizing the SSMU executive committee for "how mean they are" was mistakenly attributed to Karen Kwok. The Daily regrets the error.

In the same issue, an events listing read, "The Red Herring, McGill's humour magazine, needs to be funny." The listing should have read, "The Red Herring, McGill's humour magazine, needs *you* to be funny." Any insinuation that The Red Herring, McGill's humour magazine, is not funny was unintentional. The Daily regrets the error.

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# Questioning ideals

# Body Image Awareness Week encourages

by Jessica Lim

Walking through downtown Montréal, it is impossible not to notice the plethora of media-promoted images depicting the ideal beauty. She is the emaciated, fashionably dressed woman who most often is depicted closed mouthed and wistful looking. Billboards manifest a larger than life Kate Moss who is dangerously thin, shop windows display headless plastic mannequins cloaked in the newest trend of the season, while Calvin Klein tells us to "Just Be."

Challenging the socially imposed ideals of beauty, National Eating Disorder Week at McGill, from February 3 to 7, is aiming to help students address and deal with their physical insecurities and dissatisfactions. "There are more events this year because we want to produce a snowball effect," asserts Carmen Messerlian, coordinator of tonight's Body Image Forum. "We want to bombard people with body image awareness. We want to start a fight, [and] unless we start we're never going to get where we should."

Although 95 per cent of all people with eating disorders are women, the goal of this week is to target not only women, but men as well. "Our aim is to encourage all students at McGill to challenge the stereotypical norm of media images, to challenge the ideals and to learn to accept yourself," Messerlian says. "The only way to do that is to each take a role in being a model for another. Each of us have to be aware of our actions, and [should] project ourselves in the

most positive way possible."

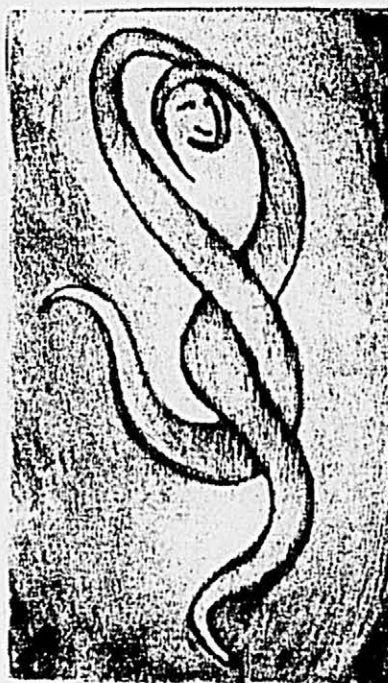
Although the media dictates what is fashionable, Messerlian believes it is unrealistic to assume that the media is the sole causal factor in catalyzing eating disorders. "Women are not like sponges that absorb these issues so passively. This would be similar to thinking that we believe everything we see on television. An eating disorder is a multi-factorial disease."

However, this week is not only for people suffering from an eating disorder, but for anyone with body image problems. Therefore, because very few people are satisfied with their body, the forum will address a larger group. Moreover, Messerlian believes that body image problems exist on a continuum, and that it is not difficult to go from one stage to another. "At the top of the continuum is dissatisfaction with your body, at the bottom is severe eating disorder. All people with eating disorders start at the top of the spectrum, and some fall to a serious case."

To address a broader range of body image issues, activities for Body Awareness Week at McGill have included an open mic night on Monday and Body Painting on Wednesday.

Monday's open mic night had a small attendance. However, the atmosphere was positive and intimate. Music and poetry was performed in the beginning, but the majority of the evening was spent discussing personal concerns. Foster-

ing a feeling of strength and courage, the group, composed of both men and women, offered a non-judgmental ear and a comforting openness.



The week will culminate with tonight's Body Image Forum and peer health workshops on Friday. The workshops are an hour in length, and will be addressing issues on eating disorders, gay men and body images, body images, and athleticism and body images.

Tonight's presentation will offer music therapy, visual images of women being celebrated regardless of their race and shape, and a forum on how to build a positive relationship with your body and with food.

## De-programming ourselves

Susan Kano, author of *Making Peace with Food* and speaker at tonight's forum, believes that the primary reason eating disorders are more prevalent in women is because of the objectification they have endured. "Women are turned into aesthetic objects," explains Kano. "[Consequently], women objectify themselves because they are trained from the beginning to be obsessed with how they look."

Women, she says, are conditioned into thinking that their "appearance is the biggest piece of their existence, [whereas] men are taught not to be obsessed with how they look. Men are taught that their worth comes from what they can do. Women are trained to objectify themselves, [and] that their worth is measured from their appearance."

However, Kano also notes the rise in number of men suffering from an eating disorder. "Many industries encourage men to worry about the way they look. But it's a slow process because men have an instinctive understanding that if they buy into it, it will translate into a loss of status. Women do not have the opportunity to

# Silence would be worst fate possible

by M-J Milloy

(CUP) Montréal

A former Prime Minister has added his voice to the growing chorus demanding that the federal government not quietly shelve the Royal Commission report on Aboriginal peoples.

"The status-quo is a source of shame for Canada... it would be a great tragedy if this report was shelved and forgotten," said Joe Clark, Progressive Conservative Prime Minister during the late 1970s, at a conference last weekend hosted at McGill University.

Jean Chrétien should act immediately and create an independent task force to educate the public about the report and encourage debate about its future, Clark said, echoing one of the proposals of the commission.

Not surprisingly, one of the co-chairs of the Royal Commission, Québec Judge René Dussault, agreed immediately with Clark's recommendation.

"We can't have an economy of debate on this report, and this recommendation is a way to do that," said Dussault.

"If people think that the aboriginal future is important enough, and the report we produced is of sufficient quality to deserve debate, then this recommendation is the way to go about ensuring that a debate occurs," he said.

Clark's comments closed the final panel discussion of the three-day conference, sponsored by McGill's Institute for Cana-

dian Studies, to debate key points of the report's political and economic recommendations.

Formed in the aftermath of 1990's Oka Crisis, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recently delivered a ground-breaking five volume report on the situation of First Nations in Canada. Spanning all aspects of aboriginal social, economic and political life, the report made over 400 recommendations.

Despite the broad vision and comprehensive nature of the report, it has been greeted with almost total silence from the Prime Minister and Ron Irwin, federal minister for Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Prime Minister Chrétien has not made any official comment about the report, and calls made to his office were not returned.

Continued silence would be the worst fate possible for this report, according to Clark.

"I don't think that these documents should be simply allowed to slide off the table of public opinion without a continued, detailed, ferocious debate on their merits."

Although Clark was reticent to speculate on the reasons for the government's inaction, he did provide at least one clue.

"I do think that there is some reluctance, generally, on the part of the Chrétien government, to look at issues of collective rights and that is a very central part of the report," he said.

## Clark and others urge action on Royal Commission



**"I don't think that these documents should be simply allowed to slide off the table of public opinion without a continued, detailed, ferocious debate on their merits." — Former PM Joe Clark, referring to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples report.**

Self-government still a controversial issue

Clark is referring to the proposal of self-government for First Nations, which is the most important proposal made by the commission, and the bedrock upon which all the other proposals rest.

The commission wants to see substantial and fundamental government powers transferred back to First Nations, such as control over taxation, political process, social services and lands and resources. In short, almost everything First Nations did before the arrival of non-Aboriginals five centuries ago.

Beyond the controversy over the scope of self-government, the proposal is controversial because these rights would be given to communities, rather than individuals as protected under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This would set a dangerous legal precedent which would endanger the rights of citizens in a democracy, say critics of self-government.

It is the same argument Andrew Coyne, national columnist for the Southam newspaper chain, used during his speech at the conference — earning the loud disapproval of most of the crowd.

"The fundamental folly (of the self-government proposals) is the elevation of identity above all other concerns, like fairness or freedom," he said.



# courages challenging the body myth



TERRY GETS PAINTED

have this instinctive understanding because [objectification] is something that is started from the day you are born."

Kano's book, *Making Peace With Food*, is a self-help book for people struggling with weight and body problems. It addresses the causes of body image problems predominantly from a psychological, sociological, and physiological standpoint. It suggests what people can do to undermine these causes, and offers alternatives to dieting.

With the current studies attempting to unearth a genetic deficiency within individuals suffering from an eating disorder, Kano believes that, aside from obesity, the studies will not be productive. "I believe that the majority of people [with eating disorders] do not have a predisposition to getting them. People may be more prone to depression and psychological problems. But, there was a time not too long ago when eating disorders were incredibly rare. I think that to look at it from a genetic standpoint will not be helpful."

Kano maintains that "training women to be super thin leads to women feeling inadequate. Women are

given the struggle of trying to fit the stereotype, [yet] they are not physiologically designed to be that way. Women with this struggle have an easy path to falling into eating disorders."

However, causes of eating disorders cannot be attributed to one source. "It may not just be society," explains Kano. "It can also be within the upbringing. One thing that is proven is that the causes of eating disorders are incredibly broad. It is a multi-dimensional thing. The fact is, there is an epidemic on our hands."

## Changes for the better

Continuing their intended snowball effect, McGill has an Eating Disorder Clinic at Student Services beginning today. "I think McGill will really benefit from the new Eating Disorder Clinic," asserts coordinator Messerlian. "Previously, resources were only found around Montréal, [but] now we have something that's immediate at McGill catered to university students."

Although the end to eating disorders is far off,

Messerlian is optimistic. "I think if you can take the worse case scenario, a hospitalized anorexic, and you can turn her around and save her, then I think anything is possible."

Proof that her words resonate truth, Messerlian was hospitalized for anorexia, and has since recovered from a seven year battle. "To get over an eating disorder you have to start small, and that's it. As soon as you set one small goal it will grow. When you break the chain of an eating disorder the end result is extreme, extreme happiness."

You can still catch the following events of Body Image Awareness Week:

Thursday, February 6: Body Image Forum at Leacock 132 7:00pm.

Friday February 7: Peer Health Workshops Sbatner Rm. 435

- 11:30-12:30 Eating Disorders
- 12:30-1:30 Gay Men and Body Image
- 1:30-2:30 Body Image
- 2:30-3:30 Athleticism and Body Image

## mission report

Coyne said that such "racially-based governments" have no place in the world, and that in Canada they would lead to political oppression of minorities, massive corruption and cronyism.

Moreover, self government is "a retreat into a traditional culture that is ill-suited to the demands of an industrial economy."

Instead, Coyne said that the Canadian government should uphold "the universal individual values of man" and not implement such wide-ranging powers of self-government.

Ovide Mercredi, Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), has heard these argument before.

"Speak like us, dress like us, be like us. This is what is called

'individual universality'. There are other names for it, like cultural genocide and racism," he said.

After obviously ditching his prepared remarks, Mercredi delivered a bitter and eloquent speech that attacked every one of Coyne's comments and brought the crowd of 500 to its feet.

He suggested that Coyne's comments hark back to the policies of the government in the last century, which attempted to assimilate First Nations into the Canadian mainstream.

"We have heard all of this before. The government used it when it put our chil-

dren in residential schools, and banned them from speaking their own language. We heard it as they forced us onto reserves, breaking our traditional economies."

Mercredi also went after Coyne's assertion that "real nations are racially-based nations."

"I don't have any difficulty with the idea of racial government — I face it every day," said Mercredi.

"When I turn on the television and watch the debates in the House of Commons, do I hear the debates happening in Cree?" he asked.

Mercredi also sarcastically agreed with Coyne's assertion that in the modern media, the group that acts the angriest gets what it wants.

"If that's the case, then it's time for the Indian people of this land to start making a hell of a lot of noise," he said.

Although Mercredi admitted that he doesn't support all of the recommendations of the commission, he argued that First Nations must be united in calling for their implementation.

"I don't want to give either Irwin or Chrétien an opportunity to not enter into a public discussion," which is what will happen if First Nations start to quibble about the content of the report, he said.

## HAPPENING

### theatre/dance cocktail with an interdisciplinary twist

#### Normal at Theatre La Chappelle, February 5 to 9

*Normal* transcends the ordinary. As an "alien interdisciplinary" experience, it is a perfect escape from the familiar sphere of everydayness and earthly drudgery. Furthermore, its physicality is refreshing coming out of the Montréal scene, which does not offer much dancework geared towards a non-yuppy audience. Although dance does occupy a central position within the framework of the performance, *Normal* sets out to satisfy the full panoply of senses, from being personally escorted to your seat, to having the inside of your brain rinsed clean. Your sixth sense might even twitch.

The project grew out of some solo dance pieces by Gerry Gradauer, founder of Tunnel Works, "a secret society of anti-art artists". These choreographies were originally set to the cosmic pop of Starbean, led by Jon Asencio, a man with a singular passion for all things extra-terrestrial. As Gradauer built the dance pieces into a theatrical context and incorporated more people into the project, Jon created a form-fitting soundtrack for a more plot-oriented structure.

Gradauer believes that dance works best in a theatrical setting "because it allows people to suspend their disbelief while they watch people moving in a different way than they have before." Tunnel Works also tries to work in an interdisciplinary context, combining the forces of different media. "It shakes up people's regular way of doing things when they are brought together in this way," continues

Gradauer, "but it requires a solid idea and structure."

In this case, the idea is an alien theme structured around a loose storyline involving the Men in Black (MIBs), impersonated by Kelly Backs, Martin Sims and Thomas Henderson, and the alien entity itself, danced by Gerry Gradauer. This theme is also conducive to an elaborate array of sight and sound which includes Asencio's music, Billy Mavreas' drawings and Johnny O'Neil's films.

The choreography itself is very sound, if not impeccable, and filled with both amusing illusions and abstract shapes. "People are always looking for meaning in dance, not just accepting the beauty of it," says Gradauer. So she has given it meaning: *Normal* is about the alien as outsider, about the irrelevance of our values in an inter-galactic setting and about the fear and secrecy which surround alien issues. Yet *Normal* tries to steer clear of Star-trekkie moralizing messages while playing with typical UFO clichés. It is debatable whether they succeed in this particularly, but they have certainly managed to create a fully enveloping and pleasing experience.

—Noëmi Tousignant

Playing February 5, 6, 7 and 8 at 20b30 and February 9 at 15h, at Theatre La Chappelle (3700 Saint-Dominique). Reservations: 843-7738.



# A small Nevada town has become an alien oasis

## A trip down to Area 51

by Craig Silverman

(CUP) Montréal — If you should ever find yourself in Las Vegas, Nevada, and have grown tired of the lounge shows, casinos, drive-through wedding chapels and neon strips, then take a sun-baked two-and-a-half hour drive along the recently renamed Extraterrestrial Highway until you come across a little town called Rachel.

But keep your eyes open all the way, because Rachel is one of those rare towns that enjoy a one-to-one ratio when it comes to humans and aliens.

It's also the closest vestige of human life to the U.S. government's top secret Nellis Air Force Base and the famed Area 51, the government's top-secret aircraft test site.

Rising from the tumbleweeds and dust on a barren stretch of Nevada highway, this former mining town has become a hotbed of Alien activity.



It all started in 1989, when Bob Lazar, claiming to be a government physicist, announced he had been hired to work on the extraterrestrial spacecraft the U.S. government was keeping at a site near Area 51.

Now this town of no more than 100 receives a constant flow of tourists from all over the world. And laughing all the way to the bank are Joe and Pat Travis. They own the only local bar and hotel in the town. A stop at the Travis' ALe'Inn (pronounced A-Lee-In) is a must for anyone.

Talk in the watering hole ranges from conspiracy theories to sightings to what is going on in the heavily guarded Area 51.

Pat Travis, Joe's wife, has an intimate relationship with one alien in particular. His name is Archibald, and he follows her everywhere she goes. But no matter how hard you squint, you won't see him: Archibald is invisible.

"Archibald is a being that travels with me. I named him for my true love, who planned to call his first born Archibald," Travis says in a calm, cautious tone. She also explains how beings regularly visit her establishment.

Her husband, Joe, hasn't had a sight-

ing of his own, but has many theories as to what is transpiring over in Area 51. Just back from feeding his pigs, Joe takes the phone from his busy wife and shares his thoughts.

"There is one theory that holds that aliens are trading technology for minerals with the government," says the gruff-voiced former carpenter.

Travis is confident that the intergalactic exchange will remain friendly. "I can't imagine why they would attack us. They have the technology to destroy us, but haven't done it so far."

The Travis' establishment features a variety of souvenir items including "Alien On Board" bumper stickers and yellow and black "Alien Crossing" road signs. The bar's most popular drink is the Beam Me Up, Scotty and they are selling Alien Burgers like hot cakes.

But while the increased traffic is pleasing people like the Travis', it has a large majority of the town upset.

Among the alien dissenters is Glenn Campbell. He lives in Upper Rachel, while the Travis' live in Lower Rachel.

"Those of us in Upper Rachel look down upon those in Lower Rachel," says the 35-year-old computer programmer. Campbell used to live in one of the trailers the Travis' rent out. Then one summer night in 1993, Joe Travis kicked him out.

Campbell explains it like this: "I was awakened by someone pounding on the door of my camper. It was Joe, very drunk. I jumped out of bed, knowing the score immediately. Joe is a man with a lot of guns and was probably carrying one."

Campbell grabbed his clothes, moved to Upper Rachel and founded the Area 51 Research Center. Campbell is skeptical about the number of sightings in the area, since most have to do with strange lights in the sky.

"There are constantly war games going on at the base, so planes are dropping flares to evade radar. It's a spectacular sight — like a curved string of pearls in the sky."

Campbell does, however, believe there is a possibility that the government is involved with aliens in Area 51.

Back in the ALe'Inn, Pat Travis takes the phone back from her husband and begins listing off the souvenir items available. She interrupts herself to yell at someone in the Inn: "Don't let them out!" she calls. Then, returning to her friendly tone, she explains that the dogs almost got out, and they would eat the chickens.

"Then my husband would have to shoot them, because they are not supposed to do that," says Travis. "Well now I guess you know just what's going on here."

But the truth is that nobody really knows what's going on in Rachel.

# Empty schtick

## David Letterman and the culture of irony is getting old

by Ira Nayman



Anybody who has watched David Letterman for an appreciable amount of time can make a mental list of his contemptuous affectations: the way he raises one eyebrow; casually tossing his cards through the supposedly glass window behind him; the sour face, etc. This is Letterman's way of winking at the audience, letting us know that he doesn't really take what's happening on-stage seriously.

See Dave be ironic. Be ironic, Dave, be ironic.

Irony encompasses many things: the way Tom Lehrer's acidic lyrics contrast with his poppy, upbeat music, for instance, or the fact that Jimmy Stewart, at the end of *Vertigo*, kills the woman he loves because of his obsession with her. Irony exists in the gap between what something appears to be and what it actually is, between the intended and actual consequences of our actions, between what one says and what one really means. This latter sense of irony, which Letterman exploits to the hilt, is a prevalent form of discourse within this society.

Sometimes it takes the form of "scare quotes," quotation marks made in the air with two fingers of each hand, which signify that what is said between them should not be taken seriously. When *Wayne's World* was popular, it took the form of adding the word "not" to any statement. Hell, *Spy Magazine* devoted a cover feature to the various ways irony had permeated North American culture.

But most often, of course, it comes as sarcasm.

I was a fan of Letterman in his early years. I thought his show was entertaining as a satiric meta-commentary on the inanity of talk shows. Over the years, however, I, like many of his early admirers, have soured on him. It's this irony thing.

In small doses, irony can be funny. But in large doses, over the course of several years, it can be unsettling. Letterman's on screen performance gives the viewer the sense that nothing is worth taking seriously. The problem with the constant denial of human values or ideals — the denial that they are legitimate — through the use of irony is that it eventually verges on nihilism: ultimately, the viewer is left with nothing positive in which to believe.

This is a fundamental problem with the larger culture of irony which Letterman represents. Ironic distance from everything

means belief in nothing — it's a hard, cold way to live, and an empty culture seems to be developing out of it.

Worse than this, however, is that we know that, at least in Letterman's case, that the irony isn't all-encompassing. Those who read the book *The Late Show* (or saw the film based on it), know that Letterman cares deeply about his place in the pantheon of television talk show hosts. He jockeyed fervently to become the host of *The Tonight Show* after Johnny Carson announced his retirement, and took it personally when he was passed over in favor of Jay Leno. He eventually moved to another network, ending up competing directly with the show he had wanted to host.

Of course, Letterman's true attitudes would occasionally surface and undercut his ironic stance. For instance, it has long been noted that he treats some of his guests with respect bordering on diffidence; clearly, some celebrities are to be taken more seriously than others.

Or take his attitude towards his corporate bosses. Letterman was fond of calling them "weasels," giving the sense that he had an antagonistic, or at least unfriendly, relationship with them. However, when Harvey Pekar (creator of the comic strip *American Splendor*) tried to talk about the relationship between NBC's parent company and the American military, Letterman got decidedly uncomfortable, and eventually tried to change the subject. Several times.

This kind of unrelenting yet selective irony is more than hypocritical, it's selfish and anti-social. Using irony to privilege your personal point of view sets yourself above anybody who does not share your standards: "I'm not going to take anything you say or believe in seriously, even though I take myself very seriously."

Society today (sometimes called late modern or post-modern) seems to be fragmenting into smaller and smaller units, with individuals slowly loosening their ties to each other. Perhaps the pervasive use of irony is a manifestation of this process. But the society we're creating is not, in the end, an especially humorous one in which to live. And this kind of irony certainly is not much fun to watch night after night.



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Pavillon des Sciences de la gestion, local R-M130  
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## Programme d'activités

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515, rue Sainte-Catherine Ouest  
Venez vous informer sur la maîtrise en sciences de l'environnement au hall principal du pavillon X.

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### ► Projection en arts plastiques

Présentation audiovisuelle de la recherche en création des professeurs et diplômés de la maîtrise en arts plastiques  
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### ► De nature urbaine : attitudes d'artistes en milieu urbain

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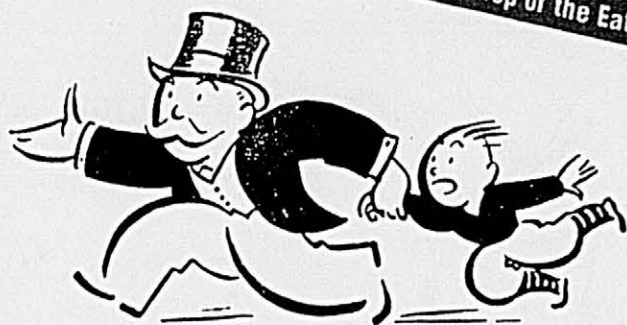


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